

CHRISTOPHER DILLON

DACHAU & the SS

A Schooling in Violence



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C. D.

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List of Abbreviations

BAB	Bundesarchiv, Berlin
BayHSta	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv
BDC	Berlin Document Center
BVP	Bayerische Volkspartei (Bavarian Peoples' Party)
DaA	Archiv der KZ-Gedenkstätte Dachau
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei (lit. State Secret Police)
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich
IKL	Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (Concentration Camp Inspectorate)
IMT	International Military Tribunal, Nuremberg
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
RuSHA	Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt (Race and Settlement Main Office)
POW	Prisoner of War
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office)
SA	Sturmabteilung (Storm Troopers)
SAM	Staatsarchiv Munich
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service)
SOPADE	Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German Social Democratic Party)
SPE	Stanford Prison Experiment
SS	Schutzstaffel (lit. Protection Squad)
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent German Social Democratic Party)
WL	Wiener Library, London

Introduction

'*I went to Dachau*'. When Rudolf Höß wrote these words in a Kraków prison cell in 1947 he knew that he would hang.¹ The former commandant of Auschwitz had been captured by the British Military Police and handed over to the Polish authorities for trial. He blamed his decision to volunteer for the guard units at Dachau in 1934 for setting him on an 'intricate course' of 'destiny' which led him to become one of the great mass murderers in history.² This was untrue. But Höß was certainly only one of many senior concentration camp officials to have learned his craft in pre-war Dachau. Dachau had been the most important of the early concentration camps, a bastion of the Nazi revolution and the sole bridge between this early violence and the vast citadels of terror constructed in the late 1930s. It was the training ground and forge of the concentration camp SS, an academy of violence where guards were schooled in steely resolution and the techniques of terror. An international symbol of Nazi depredation, Dachau was the cradle of a new and terrible spirit of destruction.

This book offers the first systematic study of the pre-war Dachau SS. It is not a narrow organizational history and seeks to contextualize the 'Dachau School' by approaching it from a variety of perspectives. It charts the depths of individual and collective conduct in an institutional setting while encouraging the reader to suspend comforting preconceptions that violent behaviours are simply products of pathological personalities and beliefs. Without losing sight of the specificities of Dachau, it claims a significance even beyond the thousands of SS guards trained there: for the pre-history of the Holocaust, and for the social and institutional organization of violence more broadly. Contrary to an ongoing tendency to mystify the Nazi concentration camps and to sequester them from broader historical processes, Dachau was the product of human interaction and its guards amenable to analysis as social phenomena.³

¹ Rudolf Höß, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Hoess*, trans. Constantine FitzGibbon (London, 2000 [1959]), p. 65. Emphasis in original.

² Höß, *Commandant*, p. 64.

³ For the international context, see the recent succinct analysis by Richard Overy, 'Das Konzentrationslager: Eine internationale Perspektive', *Mittelweg*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (2011), pp. 40–5. Available in English translation at <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2011-08-25-overly-en.html>> (accessed 14 February 2014). For the social dimension, see the discussion of literature below, especially Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 3–15.

The book brings together two streams of research into the history of National Socialism which have moved towards the centre of the historiographical agenda in recent years. The first is research into the history of the pre-war concentration camps. Surprisingly, there is still no comprehensive monograph on Dachau. Like the other pre-war camps, its history has been written instead by former German and Austrian political prisoners and is commemorative, rather than analytical, in intent. Quite understandably, these authors (and their readers) were concerned with documenting and memorializing the suffering of their comrades in the camps rather than with analytical reflection on their historical context. If they wrote about the guards at all, it was as either atavistic brutes or epiphenomenal figures, secondary expressions of an underlying 'fascist' ideology.⁴

During the 1980s impulses to fresh research beyond the canonized texts of former inmates came from the German 'history workshop' movement. Younger researchers, often affiliated with concentration camp memorial sites, gathered documents and oral histories from the localities of concentration camps. These have greatly enriched our understanding of their social context. They also began the process of rendering visible the experiences of non-political inmate groups hitherto marginalized in 'anti-fascist' literature. And in the last decade or so a range of empirical studies on the domestic concentration camps, coordinated by the memorial sites and their heads (frequently trained historians themselves), has picked up the baton from the history workshop movement. A range of encyclopaedic treatments of individual camps is now available in German, along with a massive encyclopaedia in English published recently by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.⁵ Yet it is striking how rarely the SS personnel are discrete topics even in this literature, falling as they do beyond what remains a largely commemorative exercise.

The second stream of research is the burgeoning historiography of those who have become known as National Socialist 'perpetrators' (*Täter*), the agents of persecution and violence who enacted the policies of the regime at ground level. These men and women were long marginalized by a universalizing historiographical discourse which, since the 1960s, had privileged the role of supra-personal structures in the criminality of the Third Reich.⁶ Höß played something of a posthumous role here as the pioneering text was Martin Broszat's introduction to the German

⁴ The most recent contribution to this distinguished line of writing on Dachau is Stanislav Zámečník, *That Was Dachau: 1933–1945* (Paris, 2004). Although the book is described in the blurb as a 'complete, scholarly presentation of the history of the Dachau concentration camp' it has very little to say about the SS. Similar caveats apply to Hans-Günter Richardi, *Schule der Gewalt: Das Konzentrationslager Dachau 1933–1934* (Munich, 1933), a well-researched yet commemorative compendium of prisoner memoirs.

⁵ Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (eds), *Der Ort des Terrors: Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager* (8 vols, Munich, 2005–2009); *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopaedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945* (2 vols, Washington, DC, 2009–2012).

⁶ A. D. Moses, 'Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and his Critics', *History and Theory*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (May, 1998), pp. 194–219. Moses uses the ancient philosophical binary of the particular and universal to code, respectively, dispositional/ideological and situational/social readings of perpetrators. This taxonomy will also be used throughout the present study. For a penetrating bibliographical essay on *Tätergeschichte*, see also Gerhard Paul, 'Von Psychopathen, Technokraten des Terrors und "ganz gewöhnlichen" Deutschen. Die Täter der Shoah im Spiegel

edition of his memoirs in 1958. Broszat depicted Höß as a ‘normal petit-bourgeois type’ who ‘always did his duty’ to ‘whichever authority’ he recognized at the time.⁷ This concept of the SS perpetrator’s normality, a reaction in part to the immediate post-war tendency to demonize him, would guide scholarship for decades. Hannah Arendt offered a very similar reading in her account of the Israeli trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Like Broszat, Arendt could find no ‘demonic profundity’, little evidence even of antisemitism, in the accused whom she presented instead as an unremarkable German bureaucrat: ambitious, anomic, unreflective, a lesson in the ‘banality of evil’.⁸ Arendt’s intellectual prestige and sparkling, authoritative prose contributed to the fertile reception of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* but her conclusions echoed those of a then lesser-known German émigré. Raul Hilberg’s monumental *The Destruction of the European Jews* likewise offered a universalist reading of the Nazi perpetrator as a detached, coldly careerist Everyman.⁹ Values and ideology featured in this universe less as motivation than cynical rationalization. In Hilberg’s guiding metaphor, the Holocaust was the culmination of an unbound, self-propelled ‘machinery of destruction’ requiring no great personal malice from most participants: ‘all necessary operations were accomplished with whatever personnel were at hand’.¹⁰

In the resurgent field of social psychology, too, consensus formed on the universal human readiness to inflict suffering. In the early 1960s Stanley Milgram carried out a series of laboratory experiments on the evolutionary tendency towards ‘obedience to authority’. His hypothesis that cruelty was a social phenomenon driven by situational power relationships seemed confirmed when two-thirds of his ordinary American volunteers administered what they believed were electric shocks of up to 450 volts on his accomplice learner, despite his screams of pain and complaint of a heart condition.¹¹ The analogies to concentration camp personnel were evident and Milgram did not refrain from ambitious extrapolations from his laboratory. The Holocaust, he proposed, was ‘the most extreme instance of abhorrent immoral acts carried out by thousands of people in the name of obedience’.¹² He later added that if a system of concentration camps were set up in the United States, sufficient personnel to staff them could be found ‘in any medium-sized American town’.¹³

der Forschung’, in Paul (ed.), *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen, 2002), pp. 13–90. Specifically on the SS, see the literature review by Jan Erik Schulte, ‘Zur Geschichte der SS: Erzähltraditionen und Forschungsstand’, in Schulte (ed.), *Die SS, Himmler und die Wewelsburg* (Paderborn, 2009), pp. xi–xxxv.

⁷ Martin Broszat, ‘Einleitung’, in Broszat (ed.), *Rudolf Höß: Kommandant in Auschwitz. Autobiografische Aufzeichnungen* (Munich, 1963 [1958]), s. 11.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report into the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1994 [1963]), p. 287.

⁹ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (London, 1983). Hilberg’s book was first published in 1961.

¹⁰ Hilberg, *Destruction*, p. 649.

¹¹ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (London, 2005 [1974]), pp. 33–56.

¹² Milgram, *Obedience*, p. 4.

¹³ In Thomas Blass, *Obedience to Authority. Current Perspectives on the Milgram Paradigm* (New Jersey, 1985), pp. 35–6.

Similarly unequivocal conclusions were reached by his colleague, Philip Zimbardo, in the Stanford Prison Experiment of 1971.¹⁴ We will return to the details and implications of these experiments later in the book; for now it is sufficient to note that their explicit linkage to the Holocaust and to Arendt's work in particular helped to create a universal interpretive paradigm of Nazi perpetrators which, according to David Cesarani's biography of Eichmann, 'straitjacketed research into Nazi Germany and the persecution of the Jews for two decades'.¹⁵ Cesarani debits Milgram personally with the interpretation of the Holocaust as 'the zenith of modern bureaucracy, rather than a throwback to barbarism' but this is reductive.¹⁶ The pre-eminence of the abstract bureaucratic trope in this period also reflected the talents of a cohort of young structuralist historians at the Munich Institute for Contemporary History. They produced what remains one of the finest analyses of the SS and concentration camp system, *Anatomy of the SS State*, as expert consultants to the Frankfurt trial of Auschwitz personnel in 1963. A masterly and judicious reconstruction of the bureaucratic chain of command in the SS, this was nonetheless a distinctly arid and impersonal history.¹⁷

A number of important later works also stand in this universalist tradition. Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* casts Nazi perpetrators as 'men in uniforms, obedient and disciplined, following the rules and meticulous about the spirit and letter of their briefing'.¹⁸ Calls for a more dispositional, ideological reading are accused of seeking a 'metaphysical prop', where '[d]iscussion of guilt masquerades as the analysis of causes'.¹⁹ Wolfgang Sofsky, in a bold and compelling sociology of the concentration camps, concurred. 'Institutional terror', he concluded, 'produces perpetrators who do without reasons for their actions . . . the identity of the victim was totally immaterial'.²⁰ There is a lot at stake in this debate and the heavy burden of explanation generates partisan positions framed in aggrieved moral vocabulary. Historians too often adopt a posture of embattled empiricism when dealing with situational theorists like Bauman and Sofsky, as isolated voices of sensitivity amid a deluge of relativizing social science.²¹ Seldom do they trouble to engage with the broader argument about the contribution of social

¹⁴ Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (London, 2007).

¹⁵ David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London, 2004), p. 15.

¹⁶ Cesarani, *Eichmann*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Helmut Krausnick et al., *Anatomy of the SS State*, trans. Richard Barry et al. (London, 1968). A lively, morally aggrieved critique of this type of 'structural' literature is offered by Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker: Erfahrung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2004).

¹⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 2000 [1989]), p. 151.

¹⁹ Bauman, *Modernity*, pp. xi, 168.

²⁰ Sofsky, *Order*, p. 229.

²¹ In addition to Cesarani, see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 2 and passim; Karin Orth and Michael Wildt, 'Die Ordnung der Lager: Über offene Fragen und frühe Antworten in der Forschung zu Konzentrationslagern', *Werkstatt-Geschichte*, Band 12 (1995), pp. 51–6; Andrea Riedle, *Die Angehörigen des Kommandanturstabs im KZ Sachsenhausen: Sozialstruktur, Dienstwege und biografischen Studien* (Berlin, 2011), p. 19; Karin Orth, *Die Konzentrationslager SS: Sozialstrukturelle Analysen und biographische Studien* (Munich, 2004), p. 11, 297; Falk Pingel, 'Social Life in an Unsocial Environment: The Inmates' Struggle for Survival', in Jane Caplan and Nikolaus Wachsmann (eds), *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* (London and New York, 2010), pp. 58–81, here p. 59; Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust. Disputed Histories* (USA, 2003), pp. 99–111. As the fiery

factors to Nazi violence. Yet as the recent scholarship of James Waller and Harald Welzer makes clear, registering these phenomena is essential to any convincing account of perpetrator behaviour.²² Both, like Milgram, stress the fundamental importance of the perpetrators' situation but also of how they construe this situation in the first place: an important moderation of extreme role-based accounts. Both also stress the complex and reciprocal relationship between thought and deed which will be seen throughout this book.

The most powerful case study in Welzer's comparative analysis is of the police battalions (units of the Order Police) seconded to the SS in occupied Poland.²³ Their murderous conduct during the Holocaust had already generated the best-known controversy in perpetrator historiography. Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men*, a microstudy of one such unit of unremarkable middle-aged policemen, was published in 1992 and documented the role of peer pressure and group psychology in their conduct.²⁴ While some aspects of his analysis—the fact that these subjects were policemen, and the fact that they were men—are clearly underplayed, *Ordinary Men* is a classic of interpretive historical narration. The same could not be said of its antagonist, Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*.²⁵ Warming up the self-righteous, exoticist tenets of Allied wartime propaganda, Goldhagen argued that German society harboured proto-genocidal intent long before Hitler. Nazi perpetrators did not need to be induced to kill: they murdered Jews because they were 'Germans first, and SS men, policemen, or camp guards second'.²⁶ Goldhagen regards more universalist readings of the perpetrators as morally compromised in diminishing their personal responsibility and relativizing the singular horror of the Final Solution. He was quite right to demand greater focus on the Jewish identity of its victims. Yet among its many shortcomings, Goldhagen's book offers no explanation for the avid involvement of tens of thousands of non-Germans in the Holocaust, nor for the abrupt disappearance of the German tradition of murderous antisemitism after 1945. The latter he attributes, in a pair of footnotes,²⁷ to an efficacious post-war Allied re-education programme, whilst disregarding the possible impact of propaganda and schooling by the Nazis during the Third Reich.²⁸

introductions to *Modernity and the Holocaust* and *The Order of Terror* show, this sense of grievance is mirrored on the other side of the disciplinary divide.

²² James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (2007); Harald Welzer, *Täter: wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005) and, to a lesser extent, Sönke Neitzel and Harald Welzer, *Soldaten: On Fighting, Killing, and Dying* (London, 2012). I am not persuaded that the tapped and boastful conversations between these personnel offer as robust a basis for social psychological analysis (Welzer's contribution to the book) as the much broader fabric of sources and case studies in *Täter*.

²³ On the Order Police, see the dependable, if diffident, monograph by Edward B. Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (Kansas, 2005).

²⁴ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London, 2001 [1992]).

²⁵ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London, 1997).

²⁶ Goldhagen, *Executioners*, p. 7.

²⁷ Goldhagen, *Executioners*, p. 594, fn 38; p. 605, fn 53.

²⁸ See Browning's demolition of Goldhagen's argument in *Ordinary Men*, pp. 193–212.

Goldhagen was clearly wrong about ‘the Germans’, but might his arguments still apply to the SS? Contrary to his historiographical caricatures, a number of important works had already flagged the importance of ideological and dispositional factors. Tom Segev’s pioneering group biography of concentration camp commandants stressed their fervent commitment to the Nazi cause and gradual inurement to atrocity through a ‘process of inner hardening’.²⁹ Segev emphasized the personal leadership of Theodor Eicke, Dachau’s second commandant and subsequently head of the camp network, as the driving force in the pre-war camps and father of the Dachau School. Most commandants had joined the National Socialist movement at a young age and Segev, an Israeli, encountered little contrition in his discussions with surviving perpetrators and their families.³⁰ Bernd Wegner’s monograph on the *Waffen SS*, published in 1983, also located ideology in the perpetrators’ foreground.³¹ One of these SS combat formations, the Death’s Head Division, was commanded by Eicke and formed around a core of sentries from the pre-war concentration camps. Wegner focused on the distinctive and unstable admixture of the modern and anti-modern in SS ideology. The SS man envisaged himself as a ‘political soldier’ primed to forge the Nazi new order with ruthless and steely ideological commitment: mere ‘banal’ obedience in his universe was inadequate.³² Charles Sydnor’s compelling monograph on the Death’s Head Division took a similar line.³³ In Sydnor’s narrative the men of the division, much like the commandants investigated by Segev, were ideological warriors brutalized by service in the camps whose trail of racial murder throughout Europe is inexplicable in universal, situational terms.

Historical research into concentration camp personnel has been rejuvenated in the last decade by Karin Orth’s study of its leadership corps. The book emerged under the auspices of a project on generation and ideology which has generated some outstanding scholarship on the SS.³⁴ The 200 senior camp officials analysed by Orth saw themselves as heroic figures battling at an ‘inner front’.³⁵ While their inner camp world reflected the group dynamics explored by universalist literature, Orth also contributes to the process of ideologizing the perpetrators. This was a group of lower-middle class men deeply imprinted with the social and economic crises of the Weimar Republic. They had committed early to the Nazi movement and their murderous tenure in the camps reflected political conviction as much as brutalization and environment.³⁶ Four recent German monographs, building

²⁹ Tom Segev, *Soldiers of Evil: The Commandants of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (Glasgow, 2000), p. 272.

³⁰ Segev, *Soldiers*, p. 7.

³¹ Bernd Wegner, *The Waffen SS: Organisation, Ideology and Function* (Oxford, 1990 [1983]).

³² Wegner, *Waffen SS*, pp. 27–33.

³³ Charles W. Sydnor, *Soldiers of Destruction: The SS Death’s Head Division 1933–1945* (Princeton, 1990 [1977]).

³⁴ Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903–1989* (Bonn, 1996); Isabel Heinemann, ‘Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut’. *Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen, 2003); Orth, *Konzentrationslager SS*; Michael Wildt, *An Unconditional Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Wisconsin, 2009).

³⁵ Orth, *Konzentrationslager SS*, p. 11.

³⁶ Orth, *Konzentrationslager SS*, p. 88–9.

on Orth's work and taking different approaches, have explored the perpetrators of individual camps. Hans-Peter Klausch chronicles the commandants of the early SS camps in the Emsland in five richly detailed biographies.³⁷ Although stronger on biographical minutiae than explanation, Klausch makes a convincing case for the centrality of visceral anticommunism, rather than Nazi eugenic and racial precepts, to the self-understanding and motivation of these men.³⁸ A biographical approach also guides Andrea Riedle's immaculately researched monograph on the commandant staff personnel of Sachsenhausen. The great merit of the book is its rigorous and detailed quantitative analysis of their backgrounds as well as the patterns of promotion to the officer corps.³⁹ Yet Riedle has little to say on the social and cultural factors shaping the collective ethos at Sachsenhausen. These aspects are explored in detail by Elissa Mailänder Koslov's acclaimed study of the female guard personnel at Majdanek concentration camp.⁴⁰ Drawing primarily on post-war judicial proceedings, Koslov focuses on the entwined contributions of gender, power, and performance to the terror in Majdanek. Women were not admitted as members to the masculine SS but many of Koslov's subjects were not outshone in violence and terror by their male counterparts.⁴¹ Marc Buggeln's equally impressive monograph on the wartime satellite camps of Neuengamme is also informed by a social and cultural methodology.⁴² Buggeln stresses the importance of universalist factors such as role and situation in the perpetrators' propensity for violence. But, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's work, he also shows that role and situation are dynamic rather than static, constantly constructed and constituted by their protagonists.⁴³

The present book also supports an 'interactionist' analysis, the proposition that culture, cognition, and situation interact in perpetrator behaviour.⁴⁴ Like the monographs discussed above, it is somewhat constrained by the available source material. The concentration camp SS were careful to destroy most of their files towards the end of the war with the approach of the Allied armies.⁴⁵ The Dachau SS seem to have been particularly diligent in this regard and very few commandant

³⁷ Hans-Peter Klausch, *Tätergeschichten: Die SS Kommandanten der frühen Konzentrationslager im Emsland* (Bremen, 2005).

³⁸ Klausch, *Tätergeschichten*, pp. 265–78.

³⁹ Riedle, *Angehörigen*, pp. 67–129.

⁴⁰ Elissa Mailänder Koslov, *Gewalt im Dienstalltag: Die SS-Aufseherinnen des Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslagers Majdanek* (Hamburg, 2009).

⁴¹ On female guards, see also the absorbing collection of essays edited by Simone Eberle. Simone Eberle (ed.), *Im Gefolge der SS: Aufseherinnen des Frauen-KZ Ravensbrück* (Berlin, 2007).

⁴² Marc Buggeln, *Arbeit und Gewalt: Das Außenlagersystem des KZ Neuengamme* (Göttingen, 2009).

⁴³ Buggeln, *Arbeit*, pp. 19–21.

⁴⁴ Interactionism is associated above all with the social psychologist Thomas Blass. See for example Thomas Blass, 'Understanding Behavior in the Milgram Obedience Experiment: The Role of Personality, Situations, and their Interactions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 60 (1991), pp. 398–413; Thomas Blass, 'Psychological Perspectives on the Perpetrators of the Holocaust: The Role of Situational Pressures, Personal Dispositions, and their Interactions', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1993), pp. 30–50. See also the judicious comments in Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York, 1986), p. 468.

⁴⁵ Johannes Tüchel, *Konzentrationslager: Organisationsgeschichte und Funktion der Inspektion der Konzentrationslager 1934–1938* (Boppard, 1991), p. 27. Tüchel's monograph offers an excellent organizational history of Eicke's Concentration Camp Inspectorate.

staff circulars (*Kommandanturbefehle*), for example, a source compiled into an invaluable documentary collection for Auschwitz, survive from Dachau.⁴⁶ ‘Ego documents’ by concentration camp personnel, such as Höß’s memoirs, are also few and far between. Other sources, fortunately, are relatively abundant. Although the judicial testimony of former camp guards is frequently sullen and mendacious, it can sometimes prove very illuminating. For Dachau the historian has cause to thank the conspicuous purpose and tenacity of the post-war investigation led by the Munich coroner Dr Nikolaus Naaff. His team focused primarily on the early years of the camp, picking up documentary threads left by their thwarted judicial predecessors in 1934. This resource, comprising some 140 criminal investigations, has barely been used by historians.⁴⁷ The US-led Dachau Trials, too, although restricted juridically to crimes committed against Allied personnel after 1941, gathered testimony from pre-war guards and inmates.

Published prisoner memoirs from the period of the Dachau School are also plentiful as the majority of its inmates were political prisoners, the group most likely to record its experiences in the camp. To these can be added hundreds of unpublished testimonies held in the Dachau memorial site archive, the Munich Staatsarchiv, the Institute for Contemporary History, and the Wiener Library. The great majority were written shortly after the liberation of the camp and as such are less subject to the intrusion of extraneous and collective memory into the material. Of the memoirists who will accompany us throughout this book, special mention should be made of Paul Martin Neurath, Ludwig Schecher, Alfred Hübsch, Karl Röder, Hugo Burkhard, Hans Schwarz, and Alfred Laurence.⁴⁸ Their unflinching acuity and stubborn humanity has made its writing a good deal easier. Another illuminating and largely untapped source are SS personnel records held in the former Berlin Document Center collection at the Bundesarchiv. SS personnel files, although uneven in content, offer some intriguing case studies as well as the basis for quantitative analysis of guard personnel. The documentary record of the broader SS, including the evidence gathered for the Nuremberg Trials, is also extensive.

One thing most historians and former prisoners agree on is that concentration camp guards, contrary to popular assumptions, were seldom psychopaths:

⁴⁶ Norbert Frei et al. (eds), *Standort und Kommandanturbefehle des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz 1940–1945* (Munich, 2000). Only for Sturthof are these orders available in comparable fullness.

⁴⁷ A recent exception is Rolf Seubert’s combative essay on the early months in Dachau. Rolf Seubert, ‘“Mein lumpiges Vierteljahr Haft . . .” Alfred Anderschs KZ-Haft und die ersten Morde von Dachau: Versuch einer historiografischen Rekonstruktion’, in Jörg Dörig and Markus Joch (eds), *Alfred Andersch ‘Revisited’: Werkbiographische Studien im Zeichen der Sebald-Debatte* (Berlin, 2011), pp. 47–146.

⁴⁸ Paul Martin Neurath, *The Society of Terror: Inside the Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration Camps* (Colorado, 2005); Dachau Gedenkstätte (DaA), A1603, Karl Ludwig Schecher, ‘Rückblick auf Dachau’; DaA, A1436, Alfred Hübsch, ‘Die Insel des Standrechts’; DaA, A1960 Hans Schwarz, ‘Wir Haben es nicht Gewusst. Erlebnisse, Erfahrung und Erkenntnisse aus dem Konzentrationslager Dachau’; Karl Röder, *Nachtwache: 10 Jahre KZ Dachau und Flossenbürg* (Wien, 1985); Hugo Burkhard, *Tanz Mal Jude! Von Dachau bis Shanghai. Meine Erlebnisse in den Konzentrationslagern Dachau—Buchenwald—Ghetto Shanghai 1933–1948* (Nuremberg, 1967); DaA Alfred Laurence, ‘Dachau Overcome: The Story of a Concentration Camp Survivor’.

individuals with clinical, medical disorders. Psychopaths there doubtless were among these perpetrators but most memoir literature places them as a tiny minority of the personnel, no more than 5 to 10 per cent.⁴⁹ Individuals with clinical personality disorders are not easily deployed in military and paramilitary organizations, particularly in so confined an institution as a concentration camp. They do not follow routines or develop the requisite comradely values.⁵⁰ Instead, violent behaviours at Dachau were variously encouraged, instilled, and excavated from a heterogeneous body of mostly very young males. As Neurath puts it, the 'conditions under which these SS men were trained made the system independent of the available supply of psychopaths'.⁵¹ This dispiriting and disarming truth informs the book to follow.

⁴⁹ See the insightful discussion in Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extremes: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (1999), pp. 121–4. As Todorov observes, 'we cannot understand the evils of the concentration camps in terms of abnormality unless we define abnormality, tautologically, as the behavior in question'.

⁵⁰ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, pp. 73–5.

⁵¹ Neurath, *Society*, p. 71.

1

‘We’ll Meet Again in Dachau’: The Early Dachau SS

Erwin Kahn was certain there had been a mistake. A Jewish businessman from Munich, he was one of Dachau’s first prisoners, taken into protective custody on the street by an SA man a few days previously and brought to the new concentration camp via Stadelheim prison. On 23 March 1933 he wrote a letter to his wife, Evi.¹ The camp was under the stewardship of the Bavarian State Police (*Landespolizei*) and he assured her she need not be unduly concerned; he was not a member of the German Communist Party (KPD) and was confident the misunderstanding would be cleared up when he was interrogated. The treatment and food were ‘very good’ and his cellmates ‘mostly good sorts’, some ‘very pleasant’. Kahn was curious to see ‘how long this business goes on’ but also bored of waiting around and anxious to get back to his work. He asked Evi to send cigarettes, matches, and a newspaper with her next letter, along with some thick socks as the floor of his cell was cold. One week later Kahn wrote to her again. He was now, to his relief, working for six hours every day in the camp and determined to ‘keep his chin up’. The detainees were now allowed to receive inspected parcels and he asked for toothpaste, butter, marmalade, *Streichwurst* (meat paste), plums, cake, hard-boiled eggs, and his pipe, the latter in view of rumours that the camp ban on smoking was to be lifted. His next letter, dated 5 April, remained guardedly optimistic that everything would be resolved as soon as the police got round to interrogating him. Evi’s letters were a consolation amidst uncertainty and ‘on the whole’, he concluded, ‘I can’t really complain’.²

Twelve days later Erwin Kahn was dead, shot five times at point-blank range in woods near the camp on the mendacious grounds that he had been ‘trying to escape’. He lay in Schwabing hospital for five days before succumbing to his wounds. Kahn was one of twelve protective custody prisoners murdered by the Dachau SS in just two months, under the very noses of the Bavarian State Police.

¹ Following from Staatsarchiv Munich (SAM), Staatsanwaltschaft (StA) 34479/2, Beglaubigte Abschrift Briefe Erwin Kahn, 16 February 1953. These files very seldom have page numbers, comprising instead brief paper transcripts of interrogations filed in date order: accordingly date only will be cited throughout.

² SAM, StA 34479/2, Beglaubigte Abschrift Briefe Erwin Kahn, 16 February 1953.

At least ten more met violent deaths by the end of 1933, confirming Dachau as the most lethal and feared concentration camp in the nascent Third Reich.³ The SS, like the much larger SA, had been involved in the establishment of a still-unknown number of loci of extra-judicial confinement in the early weeks of the new regime.⁴ Here, foes of National Socialism were kidnapped, terrorized, and beaten up, as its paramilitary formations used the advent of the Hitler government to settle local scores. On 27 February the torching of the Reichstag by a Dutch anarchist was seized on by the Nazis and conservatives in the Cabinet as an opportunity to launch a long dreamed of, more systematic crackdown on the political Left. The following day the regime promulgated a Decree for the Protection of People and State, whose suspension of personal liberties became the foundation of protective custody and, indeed, 'the constitutional charter of the Third Reich'.⁵ Concentration camps soon sprang up throughout Germany to detain tens of thousands of political opponents: real and, as with Erwin Kahn, wholly imagined. Kahn was an early and poignant adherent to the 'fallacy of innocence' among Nazism's victims, one to be rehearsed untold times in the twelve years ahead.⁶ On one level he may have been the victim of mistaken identity; on another, as a Bavarian Jew, he was laden, as will be seen, with historical perfidy in the eyes of the Dachau concentration camp SS.

Dachau, which lay 18 km to the north-west of Munich, was the most enduring and important of the early Nazi camps. It was the first state camp run solely by the SS, announced at a press conference by acting Munich Police President and *Reichsführer* of the SS Heinrich Himmler.⁷ It was a prototype for subsequent concentration camps, a national school of violence for camp personnel, and a linguistic shorthand for the nameless horrors waiting beyond barbed wire throughout the Third Reich. A cautionary verse was soon in popular circulation:

Please oh Lord, make me dumb
So I won't to Dachau come.⁸

For Himmler and the SS, left largely empty handed in the wake of the 'seizure of power', Dachau was a laboratory of terror and an opportunity to prove its

³ Slightly different figures appear in the literature in Dachau, and reflect the difficulty in some cases of ascertaining whether an inmate died in the camp, or on transports to and from it.

⁴ Nikolaus Wachsmann, 'The Dynamics of Destruction: The Development of the Concentration Camps, 1933–1945', in Caplan and Wachsmann (eds), *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany: The New Histories* (London and New York, 2010), pp. 18–20.

⁵ Ernst Fränkel, *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (New York, 1941), p. 3.

⁶ George M. Kren and Leon Rappaport, *The Holocaust and the Crisis of Human Behaviour* (New York, 1980). As the authors argue, '[i]f individuals or groups cast in the role of victim are aware of being innocent—that is, that there is no rational basis for their status as victims—there follows an almost inevitable and fallacious conclusion. They can only assume that their oppression proceeds from a mistaken judgment or momentary lapse of rationality by their oppressor . . . It then follows that if this cause or fault in the oppressor can be understood ("Why do you mistake me for something I am not?") it can be corrected, or at least moderated' (p. 74).

⁷ For a taxonomy of the early camp types, see Tüchel, *Konzentrationslager: Organisationsgeschichte und Funktion der 'Inspektion der Konzentrationslager' 1934–1938* (Boppard, 1991), pp. 38–44.

⁸ Sybille Steinbacher, *Dachau—Die Stadt und das Konzentrationslager in der NS-Zeit* (Frankfurt, 1993), p. 151.

credentials as the staunchest servant of the National Socialist state. The SS later went to considerable lengths to export what was known admiringly in its circles as the ‘Dachau spirit’ (*Dachauer Geist*) to other concentration camps.⁹ Alumni of the early Dachau SS—defined here as those stationed at the camp at the time of its final handover from the State Police on 30 May 1933—were to rise far and wide in the SS camp network. Among the rank-and-file personnel of the early Dachau SS were three future concentration camp commandants: Richard Baer (Auschwitz), Max Koegel (Ravensbrück, Majdanek, and Flossenbürg), and Martin Weiß (Neuengamme, Majdanek, and Dachau), as well as six future heads of prisoner compounds (*Lagerführer*): Friedrich Ruppert (Dachau), Anton Thumann (Gross-Rosen and Neuengamme), Wolfgang Seuss (Natzweiler), and Franz Hößler, Vincenz Schöttl, and Johann Schwarzhuber (all Auschwitz). The remainder of the early Dachau SS were not to achieve such infamy, but comprised a professional corps of camp staff and aspirant political soldiers, many of whom exported techniques developed in Dachau throughout the Reich, and later occupied Europe.

The provenance of these first Dachau guards has not hitherto been explored by historians, although it has sometimes been claimed that a particularly brutal local Dachau *Sturm* (platoon) had already made a name for itself in the street-fighting years of the late Weimar Republic.¹⁰ This is fiction; with just twenty members as late as 1932, Dachau’s local SS was tiny and even the local NSDAP was very much a fringe player before 1933.¹¹ The source base for such matters is generally meagre as personnel files in Dachau and the Concentration Camp Inspectorate in Oranienburg were burned with the approach of the Allied armies in April 1945. Preserved in the records of the Bavarian State Police, however, is a largely intact list of the early Dachau SS personnel drawn up by the police as part of the handover documentation.¹² These 192 names offer a robust sample of the 264 men guarding 1,763 prisoners at this point (see Figure 1.1).¹³ They were drawn almost entirely from *Standarten* of Group South of the Bavarian SS. A *Standarte*—the term derived from the Roman Standard, reflecting the influence of Italian fascism—denoted a paramilitary unit of up to 2,000 SS men linked to one of eighty regional headquarters.¹⁴ Of these 192 men, seventy-five were drawn from *Standarte* Munich, sixty from *Standarte* Augsburg, the populous industrial city to Dachau’s north-west, twenty-nine from Greater Munich, twenty-three from Landshut to the north-east,

⁹ Carina Baganz, ‘Dachau als Historischer Ort im System des Nationalsozialismus’, in Wolfgang Benz and Angelika Königseher (eds), *Das Konzentrationslager Dachau: Geschichte und Wirkung Nationalsozialistischer Repression* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 31–42; Orth, *Konzentrationslager SS*, pp. 127–52. For greater detail see Chapters 2 and 3 of the present book.

¹⁰ Shlomo Aronson, *The Beginnings of the Gestapo System: The Bavarian Model in 1933* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 20–1; Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London, 1987), pp. 32–3.

¹¹ Steinbacher, *Dachau*, pp. 67–84.

¹² DaA, A 4118, Übergabe-Prokoll, 30 May 1933.

¹³ Total SS and prisoner numbers from Klaus Drobisch and Günter Wieland, *System der NS-Konzentrationslager 1933–1939* (Berlin, 1993), pp. 51–2.

¹⁴ Robert Koehl, *The Black Corps: The Structure and Power Struggles of the Nazi SS* (Winsconsin, 1983), p. 10.



Figure 1.1 Early Dachau SS sentries, May 1933. Bundesarchiv, image 152-01-22.

with a handful of representatives from Nuremberg, Kolberg, Linz, and Vienna. Their occupations as noted by the police are largely lower-middle class, with sixty traditional working-class roles in heavy industry and unskilled agriculture, and the remainder in food production, sales, engineering, and artisanal codes.¹⁵ Whilst the early SS was far from lacking in the rowdy, beery element associated with the more proletarian SA, a disciplined self-image and the occupational background of its personnel lent it a more bourgeois character.¹⁶ Even if some of the early Dachau SS overstated their jobs, or gave learned rather than actual occupations, this is a measure of their social aspiration.

Their average age at the handover was 25.7. In contrast to the later, more youthful, profile of the SS in Dachau, these men are overwhelmingly within range of the ‘war youth’ generation of National Socialist perpetrators.¹⁷ This subcohort of

¹⁵ This accords with Detlef Mühlberger’s analysis of the rank-and-file Bavarian SS between 1929 and 1933, which identifies a ‘lower class’ percentile of 41 per cent (Mühlberger includes certain crafts in this figure), a middle class of 39 per cent, with the balance comprising students and well-heeled members: Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler’s Followers: Studies in the Sociology of the Nazi Movement* (London, 1991), p. 188.

¹⁶ Mühlberger, *Hitler’s Followers* (London, 1991), pp. 162–80.

¹⁷ A conceptual model of generation was developed in the 1920s by the sociologist Karl Mannheim, at a time when a rich body of literature was asserting the existence of a German ‘Front Generation’ forged in the trenches of the First World War. Mannheim concluded that ‘individual members of a generation become conscious of their common situation and make this consciousness the basis of their group solidarity’ and it is the integrative dynamic of a perceived shared identity, as much as any experiential homogeneity, which guides the numerous books to emerge from Herbert’s ‘Ideology and

middle-class males, born between 1900 and 1910, was deeply marked by Germany's experience between 1914 and 1933. Too young to have seen action in the First World War, they imbibed a rich German tradition of chauvinistic nationalism consolidated on the jingoistic home front, where school drills and a diet of mendacious news reports depicted the trenches as a gallant, masculine adventure.¹⁸ For these children, Germany's unexpected defeat, revolution, and the Bolshevik terror in Russia marked a definitive rupture in their socialization, soon compounded by political chaos, a humiliating peace, then hyperinflation and foreign occupation in the early 1920s.¹⁹ These attracted a significant number of future perpetrators to the radicalized student movement, exposure to *völkisch* racism, and ultimately the NSDAP in the final crisis of the Weimar Republic from 1929.

While historians have focused on the SS intellectuals from this cohort who later staffed its various departments and think tanks, the 'war youth' Bavarians of the early Dachau SS were also enmeshed in this generational narrative. Indeed, the experience of defeat and revolution had taken a particularly traumatic course in Bavaria. Munich, cradle of National Socialism, was the primary referent for its hardy myth of 1918, in which a German army poised for victory had been 'stabbed in the back' by foreign, revolutionary, and Jewish elements on the home front.²⁰ It is worth recalling these events in some detail as their impact on the Bavarian political consciousness, as the historian Ian Kershaw writes, 'would be hard to exaggerate',²¹ and they would remain key points of reference in 1933, both inside and outside the camp.

A BAVARIAN REVOLUTION

Although Bavaria had been among the last and most reluctant states to join Bismarck's Reich, it went to war in 1914—on the whole—in good spirits, buoyed

'Dictatorship' project (books listed in introduction, footnote 32). An early reflection on the 1900–1910 generation was offered by Sebastian Haffner, *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde. An Eyewitness Account of Nazi Germany* (London, 2005 [1940]), pp. 49–64. More broadly on generation, see the excellent conceptual evaluation by Ulrike Jureit and Michael Wildt (eds), *Generationen: Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg, 2005) and Mark Roseman, *Generations in Conflict. Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770 to 1968* (Cambridge, 1995). For a critical reflection on generation, ideology, and dictatorship, see Bernd Weisbrod, 'The Hidden Transcript: The Deformation of the Self in Germany's Dictatorial Regimes', *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Nov., 2012), pp. 61–72.

¹⁸ Wildt, *An Unconditional Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Wisconsin, 2009), pp. 21–4. See also Haffner's memoirs *Defying Hitler: A Memoir* (New York, 2002), pp. 14–18.

¹⁹ On the interplay between generation and rupture or 'historical transition', see also Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence Through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford, 2011).

²⁰ See especially Tim Mason, 'The Legacy of 1918 for National Socialism', in Anthony Nicholls and Erich Matthias (eds), *German Democracy and the Triumph of Hitler: Essays in Recent German History* (London, 1971), pp. 215–39. A weighty monograph on the genesis of the stab in the back mythologies is Boris Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politischen Desintegration: Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914–1933* (Düsseldorf, 2003).

²¹ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler. 1988–1936: Hubris* (London, 1998), p. 114. On the brutalizing memory of the revolutionary interlude in Munich, see especially Martin Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt: Revolution, Inflation, und Moderne. München 1914–1924* (Göttingen, 1998), pp. 278–318.

by the prospect of annexations from a defeated France and Belgium.²² A photograph capturing jubilant scenes on Munich's Odeonsplatz after the declaration of war on Russia later became famous when a euphoric, 25-year-old Adolf Hitler was identified in the crowd.²³ Hitler was among 1.43 million men to serve in the Bavarian army, around 20 per cent of the state's population.²⁴ Mounting casualties in Flanders soon dented public enthusiasm and rekindled ancestral anti-Prussian sentiment and bitterness at Bavarian 'cannon fodder for Berlin'.²⁵ Each year the Bavarian army lost a third of its men through death, injury, or illness. By the end of the war it had suffered 345,000 wounded and 200,000 killed in action, with almost half the latter coming from the nineteen to twenty-four age group.²⁶ On the home front spiralling inflation, acute food shortages caused by the Allied blockade, falling crop yields, and a command agricultural economy brought further disillusionment and widespread malnutrition.²⁷ For the war youth generation, material want was compounded by the absence of male relatives and teachers at the front, each of which found expression in elevated delinquency, theft, and a good deal of bureaucratic hand-wringing about the 'demoralization' and 'brutalization' of young males at home.²⁸ Perceived inequalities in the social distribution of privation, as elsewhere in Germany, ratcheted up class tensions barely submerged by the 'civil truce' (*Burgfrieden*) of 1914.²⁹

Munich soon became the focus of politicized war weariness and discontent. Hitler returned on leave in 1916 to a Bavarian capital where, he recalled in *Mein Kampf*, the public mood was 'much much worse' even than in restive Berlin: 'to be a slacker passed almost as a sign of higher wisdom, while loyal steadfastness was considered a symptom of inner weakness and narrow-mindedness'.³⁰ Behind this, of course, he detected the machinations of Jews seeking to camouflage their parasitic and revolutionary activities with anti-Prussian propaganda. As so often in his autobiography, Hitler was claiming a prescience in reality born of the German

²² Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt*, pp. 28–9; MacGregor Knox, *To The Threshold of Power, 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 148–50; Robert S. Garnett, *Lion, Eagle, and Swastika: Bavarian Monarchism in Weimar Germany, 1918–1933* (New York and London, 1991), p. 21.

²³ Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936*, p. 89.

²⁴ Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany 1914–1923* (Oxford, 2007), p. 30.

²⁵ Michaela Karl, *Die Münchner Räterepublik: Porträts einer Revolution* (Düsseldorf, 2008), p. 8. These complaints extended to widespread bitterness about the declining quality of beer, widely pinned on Berlin's requisitioning of Bavarian hops. As Ernst Toller put it in his memoirs, 'Just because the Prussian swine didn't mind bad beer, the Bavarian also had to swallow dishwater'. Ernst Toller, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1963), p. 132. The food situation was in fact a good deal worse in northern Germany, particularly after 1916.

²⁶ Ziemann, *War Experiences*, p. 32.

²⁷ Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt*, pp. 40–7; Ziemann, *War Experiences*, pp. 166–73.

²⁸ Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 23–4, 239–52; Andrew Donson, *Youth in the Fatherless Land: War Pedagogy, Nationalism and Authority in Germany 1914–1918* (London, 2010).

²⁹ David Clay Large, *Where Ghosts Walked: Munich's Road to the Third Reich* (London & New York, 1997), pp. 57–65. A thematic analysis of rural unrest is offered by Robert Moeller, 'Dimensions of Social Conflict in the Great War: The View from the German Countryside', *Central European History*, Vol. 14 (1981), pp. 142–69.

³⁰ Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London, 1972 [1926]), p. 175.

Right's subsequent 'lessons' of defeat. In January 1918 a wave of industrial strikes was organised in Munich by Kurt Eisner, stellar propagandist of the anti-war Independent German Social Democratic Party (USPD). Eisner, although born himself in Berlin, undoubtedly mobilized anti-Prussian sentiment in his agitation. He was also, as one historian puts it, 'a caricaturist's dream'.³¹ A bohemian Jewish journalist and theatre critic, Eisner was a denizen of arty Munich Schwabing; pale and balding with a luxurious beard, hat, and pince nez. Convicted of treason, he was imprisoned for nine months in Stadelheim prison before being released in a general amnesty in October. Eisner was to be at the forefront of the November revolution in Bavaria, a state previously noted for conservatism and stability but the only one in which the declaration of a republic preceded the German armistice, thus enabling the Right most fully to misrepresent cause for effect. In Munich, too, the revolutionary interval lasted the longest of all German cities, leaving a commensurate scar on the Bavarian political consciousness.

Eisner, however, had minimal control over fast-moving events. The capitulation of Austria–Hungary on 3 November 1918 exposed Bavaria to the prospect of Entente invasion through Bohemia and the Tyrol, while a simultaneous American breakthrough at Verdun presaged the collapse of German resistance on the Western Front.³² The example of the German Baltic fleet, which mutinied at orders to engage the British in a final act of operatic defiance, proved instructive. Munich, like other German cities, was soon awash with rifles brought home or discarded by demobilized and, frequently, deserting soldiers.³³ Revolutionary soldiers' and workers' councils on the Russian model filled the space vacated by a crumbling monarchy.³⁴ From these Eisner secured authorization to proclaim a republican government, and led crowds in occupying barracks and military installations. His regime proved more radical than its Prussian counterpart, reflecting the relative weakness of moderate, and moderating, Social Democracy in Bavaria. It lost little time in alienating mainstream opinion. On 25 November 1918, Eisner published a collection of 'Documents on the Origins of the War', confidential papers from the Foreign Ministry highlighting Germany's role in Austria–Hungary's unyielding ultimatum to Serbia in 1914. Coming at a time when Allied deliberations over the peace treaty had barely begun, this was considered scandalously unpatriotic and irresponsible even on the Left.³⁵ For the German Right it was high treason and eloquent confirmation of treacherous socialist and Jewish attitudes to

³¹ Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, p. 48. Another vivid portrait of Eisner is given in Richard M. Watt, *The Kings Depart: The German Revolution and the Treaty of Versailles 1918–1919* (London, 1973 [1968]), pp. 312–30. A more conventional and detailed biography is offered by Bernhard Grau, *Kurt Eisner 1867–1919* (Munich, 2001).

³² Alarm at this saw the best-equipped and most reliable Bavarian units in Munich deployed on the Tyrolean border immediately after the Habsburg collapse, greatly easing the revolutionaries' takeover of the city in the following weeks: Garnett, *Lion*, p. 23.

³³ Large, *Where Ghosts Walked*, pp. 241–2.

³⁴ On the councils' movement and (far from homogeneous) ideologies, see especially Eberhard Kolb, *Die Arbeiterräte in der deutschen Innenpolitik 1918–1919* (Düsseldorf, 1962).

³⁵ Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria 1918–1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton, 1965), p. 256.